



THE IMPACT OF ONLINE LEARNING IN GLOBAL HIGHER EDUCATION DURING COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

During the current COVID-19 pandemic, online learning quickly emerged as the go-to choice for global higher education institutions to continue instruction. Technology and education must work together to secure the future for students and a global society. Higher education in the 21st century is knowledge-based; learning is critical as resiliency continually becomes essential for survival during the pandemic. Educators have historically been dispensers of information; however, in today's technology-driven framework the exact opposite is true--educators must become facilitators of knowledge. The need for changing traditional approaches to higher education from reactionary approaches and the acquisition of short-term skills to proactive programs driven by online learning are of paramount importance as educational institutions prepare students for the 21st century. In the current scenario of COVID-19 the mandate is to provide quality education through appropriate online learning. Online learning in the face of global shocks such as the COVID-19 remains the only way to ensure continuous learning.

KEY WORDS: Online learning, global higher education, COVID-19 pandemic, Technology for learning

INTRODUCTION:

The world is facing global challenges such as COVID-19 which require universities to change educational formats, develop their own strategies, and constantly adjust them (Hechinger & Lorin, 2020). As a result, global higher education has now become central to the changes sweeping through the world, particularly with the COVID-19 pandemic (Johnson, Veletsianos, & Seaman, 2020). In this global knowledge economy, higher education institutions are more important than ever as channels for a wide range of cross-border relationships and continuous global flows of people, information, knowledge, technologies, products and financial capital. The age of technology and the information society are sweeping global higher education towards a future dependent upon knowing how, not knowing what (Drucker, 1999).

Globalization would not have happened without technology. The world is now in an information age, in an age when knowledge doubles in little more than a year, and in an age when education's future will be determined by how well educators assimilate and use the new information (Everhart & Seymour, 2017). Online teaching and learning have now become the 'new normal' in higher education, driven in part by student demand for individualized learning and largely by COVID-19 (McMurtrie, 2020).

Some suggest that the key to long-term success for global higher education in the COVID-19 pandemic is resiliency, not sustainability (Vlachopoulos, 2020). To address this issue, most higher education institutions turned to online learning as a tool for continuing student learning during a time of isolation away from campus (Radha, Mahalakshmi, Kumar, & Saravanakumar, 2020). As technical capabilities continue to improve, and as students and faculty improve their abilities to utilize new technological tools, a new era in online learning appears imminent (Olusola, 2020).

New Technology for Learning:

In general, online learning is broadly defined as the instructional content and/or learning experiences delivered or enabled by electronic technologies (Bonvillian & Singer, 2013). Online learning has several unique advantages, such as flexibility, interactivity, self-pacing, and convenience (McCormack, Lemoine, & Richardson, 2020a). New technologies, especially the Web 2.0, virtual and social networking tools, and online education have enabled learning to be a phenomenon of participated and shared intelligence (Dennis, 2018). Now that society has assumed a global focus, supported and sustained by technology, global higher education institutions are asked to offer the highest quality education, especially during COVID-19, at a cost that can be supported and sustained (Goldin & Katz, 2018). Leaders in global higher education institutions recognize the importance of incorporating online learning into the delivery of instruction so that graduates can participate in their learning during time away from campus (Lemoine, Jenkins, & Richardson, 2017).

In this time of COVID-19 faculty are asked to place more emphasis on student centered instruction, online teaching methods, and advancements in information access (Unger & Meiran, 2020). COVID-19 has inadvertently succeeded in

introducing online learning technologies that utilize, replace, or manipulate the traditionally practiced ways of teaching and learning (McCormack, Lemoine, & Richardson, 2020b). Online learning has shifted the focus from alternative learning methods to the core processes to pursue education during a time of disruption (Patra & Sahu, 2020).

A change in perspective, strength and usage of current and futuristic technologies became inevitable during COVID-19 where the faculty role is particularly important in fostering learning for all students (Lederman, 2020). To keep pace with online learning, faculty must also assume a learning role as most were not thoroughly prepared to optimize online teaching. This is a formidable task for every faculty member, but especially today for a faculty member who may not be comfortable in the quickly changing world of online teaching and learning (Mseleku, 2020).

Online Learning for Advancement of Opportunity and Learning:

Technology has been present for centuries, but vast and rapid changes have made the utilization of online learning the "in thing" for global higher education institutions during COVID-19 (Kumar, Singh, Bhatnagar, Gupta, & Upadhyay, 2020). Advancements in online learning have created opportunities for global higher education institutions to extend educational opportunities beyond the traditional "brick and mortar" buildings and deliver educational services to their diverse students at a distance (Kebritchi, Lipschuetz, & Santiago, 2017).

In recent years nothing has stimulated global higher education as profoundly as online learning. The depth, diversity, and value of online learning continues to grow at an incredibly rapid pace (Daniela, Strods, & Kalniņa, 2019). Some have speculated that online learning might widen the division between social classes; rather, online learning may be the great equalizer by allowing all students the opportunity to learn at a distance (Akpan & Akpan, 2017). In the last two decades, the focus of learning has shifted from using linear interactions (for example face-to-face instruction) into learner-centered learning driven by technology. Online learning enabled learning to be a phenomenon of participated and shared intelligence (Ebner, Hell, & Ebner, 2019). There are no mandatory standards for online education, which creates a space for global higher education institutions to take the initiative, thereby producing a huge variety in the presentation of material and in its quality (Jackson, 2019).

Student Implications of Online Learning:

As a consequence of COVID-19 online learning is gaining a firm foothold in higher education around the world. However, three real challenges are evident (1) the struggle to keep up with the latest technology (Lemoine & Richardson, 2019), (2) the fight to find enough money for the technology (Jacob & Gokbel, 2018), and (3) the difficulty in getting faculty to use the new technology for online learning (Sharma & Srivastava, 2019). Typically, students are creative, interactive, and media oriented; use Web 2.0 technologies in their everyday lives; and believe that more use of such technologies in their university preparation would lead to increased preparation and engagement (Pechenkina & Aeschliman, 2017).

Online learning changes the focus of learning from content-centered (instructor based) to learner-connected (Rege Colet, 2017). Learning is bolstered, developed, and made more effective when it is social, engaged, provides learner assessment and presents multiple paths to learn. In addition, online learning enhances active learning and student engagement. Given the heavy reliance of online learning on collaborative applications and the tendency to have content built by learners, understanding of the learner behavior and their perspective of their own learning is critical (Devi, Madan, & Hemachandran, 2020). Online technologies that increase access to quality education for increasingly mobile learners seeking just-in-time, and just-for-me education solutions, challenge global higher education institutions to align their capacities to respond to the new expectations of learners during COVID-19 (Mladenova, Kalmukov, & Valova, 2020).

Online education is entrenched in adequate planning and designs of instructions based on several models, but the migration process to online education became questionable due to the absence of proper planning, design and development of online instructional programs as a result of the pandemic. The crisis-response methods were limited to delivery media without understanding or application of effective online education theories and models. Thus, the crisis-response move to online learning due to the pandemic should not be compared with effective online education but rather be seen as an attempt to continue learning for students (Dhawan, 2020).

In online learning faculty act as guides and the learners collaborate both in the teaching and learning rather than being a passive participant (Gustafson & Gibbs, 2000). Online learning increases interaction and discussion between the faculty and students. Therefore, the learning environment becomes more student-centric, which promotes active learning and connectedness. It allows flexible and personalized learning at the speed of the learner and faculty can continuously augment and expand content through digital means (Buelow, Barry, & Rich, 2018).

Online Learning and Faculty:

Online learning requires faculty to use technology as a learning tool to assist the learner with the task of learning (Englund, Olofsson, & Price, 2017). Computers and all the technological innovations that are at an educator's disposal are just tools to help educators and students find and analyze information. These tools will be important to learning, not just because they are so prevalent, but because they can provide a service to students. To be successful, faculty must develop applications using technology to assist in the learning tasks of students (Cutri & Mena, 2020). Faculty should provide knowledge and experience in how to learn and help students develop learning attitudes and attributes. Online learning can be an invaluable tool for student learning and instructional expertise (Bryson & Andres, 2020). Higher education must be forward looking, creating the future, not perpetuating the past.

Through the use of online learning, the faculty member is no longer the sole source of knowledge but instead becomes a facilitator to support student learning, while the student actively participates in what and how knowledge is imparted (Surani & Hamidah, 2020). The idea is that learning is not paced so much by the teacher as it is by the student's own capacity to acquire the material (Glover, Heppelstone, Parkin, Rodger, & Irwin, 2016). Online learning has the potential to create a wealth of learning for students not readily available in textbooks and faculty lectures, depending on learner needs and course requirements. Online learning provides a method to personalize learning to assure students master content before moving on to the next skill (Ossiannilsson, 2018). Jaggars and Xu (2016) found that the quality of interactions in online courses, and particularly the frequency and effectiveness of student-faculty interaction, was associated with higher academic performance, yet the use of online learning alone does not ensure the activity of students.

Educators must prepare students to be able to find the information they need and the knowledge of how to analyze appropriately and not just to regurgitate facts (Thambusamy, Singh, & Ramly, 2019). As online learning continues to expand, it will be important to implement opportunities for students to have meaningful interactions with peers and afford richer opportunities for collaborative learning (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020).

Quality Assurance for Online Learning:

With the outbreak of COVID-19 almost all global higher education institutions moved to online learning as the most logical means to continue learning for students (Naciri, Baba, Achbani, & Kharbach, 2020). This transition was made in a matter of days, with no time for planning, such that both the faculty and the students were compelled to embrace new teaching and learning methods and technologies at top speed, utilizing learning management systems, course websites, and digital tools for online learning (Ferri, Grifoni, & Guzzo, 2020). But was the transition successful for students and the university (Lai & Bower, 2019)?

There were some issues with students, faculty and the technology during this transition. Some problems arise from a lack of training, some from the instructor's attitudes about using the technology, and still others by hardware problems (Aboagye, Yawson, & Appiah, 2020). Faculty need to be prepared to use online learning technology, but with the advent of COVID-19 not all faculty were ready.

The result was often a disconnect between the faculty knowledge and ability to apply the knowledge in online learning situations (Cutri, Mena, & Whiting, 2020). The best online learning practices depend on creative, well-informed instructors. The instructors must be prepared not only to use technology, but also to modify and adjust the way in which they organize and deliver material (Callo & Yazon, 2020).

The top-down pressures that are mandating the delivery of online courses courses are creating a problem because the responsibility for developing and delivering these courses is bottom-up and has fallen on the shoulders of unprepared faculty members (Bloomberg, 2020). As a result of COVID-19 global colleges and universities rushed to answer the call of continuing education through online learning, which required faculty to use technology as a learning tool to assist the learner with the task of learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

Global higher education is experiencing a social and economic change that is evolving from an industrial focus at a national level to an information focus at a global level (Gülbahar & Adnan, 2020). Accountability has been a concern for educational leaders for as long as universities have existed; however, only recently has technology been a focus for accountability (Lemoine, Waller, & Richardson, 2020). In today's environment, the globalization of the 21st century fuels the current interest in accountability because the future of the world is tied inextricably to education and education appears to be functionally coupled with technology (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020).

There is a tremendous push from globalization forces for organizational change to increase student learning in order for the institutions to be accountable for the use of tax dollars and other revenues to impact learning (Deming, Goldin, Katz, & Yuchtman, 2015). Online learning has provided the impetus to deliver new learning strategies to assess and evaluate student learning, which has direct applications to quality assurance (Baber, 2020). For global higher education, three separate but related concepts: accountability, assessment and evaluation, are prerequisites for addressing quality measures to improve student learning, retention and graduation (Adedokun, 2020).

Summary

As a result of COVID-19 the world changed and now demands the revision of higher education systems to respond. Personalizing instructional delivery through the strategic use of online learning is a key part of that transformation. Increasingly the only sustainable competitive advantage is continuous innovation. In other words, the application of new knowledge. Today, the global higher education system must meet new standards of quality that are being demanded by an increasingly technological and diverse society. Since technological changes typically outpace people's ability to socialize those changes, global higher education will likely operate in a continually fluid and uncertain environment.

CONCLUSIONS:

- (1) Online learning is not a panacea but can be a reliable new opportunity to change learning.
- (2) Online learning can be a catalyst for 21st century education.
- (3) Online learning provides a means for moving from traditional classroom mediums and permits students to be interactive participants in their own learning.
- (4) COVID-19 forced the rapid adoption to online learning to continue learning.
- (5) COVID-19 has changed perspectives of life and higher education.
- (6) The rapid adoption of online learning created challenges for faculty and students.
- (7) Globalization, COVID-19 and the rapid introduction of technology demand that faculty understand and be able to use online learning.

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